

EPA Region III

Office of Public Affairs

EARLY BIRD HEADLINES

Friday, April 13, 2012

*** MORNING HOT LIST ***

Feds fund plant production on old mine land

ASSOCIATED PRESS FROSTBURG (AP) — A Western Maryland mountaintop once strip-mined for coal will produce tree seedlings to reforest eroding stream banks across the region under a federally funded project announced Thursday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The four greenhouses on a five-acre, reclaimed surface mine near Frostburg also may be used to grow other native plants and food for Frostburg State University students, officials said at an oncampus news conference. The environmental group American Rivers will implement the \$300,000 EPA grant awarded to the Western Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Council. The project is among six in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia that the EPA is funding at a total of nearly \$1.4 million through its Highlands Action Program. “These projects stand to create lasting benefits for communities throughout the highlands region,” EPA Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin said. “The six projects selected for EPA’S funding will provide protection, conservation and restoration improvements that will benefit the environment, create jobs and maintain the cultural heritage of this vital region.” The greenhouses should be in operation this year on acreage leased from the Allegany Coal and Land Co., officials said. The reclaimed land was previously used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to store hundreds of mobile homes meant to shelter disaster victims. Trees grown and planted on the barren, gravel-covered site will prevent sediment from washing into nearby Braddock Run, officials said. The greenhouse complex, staffed by two full-time workers and tended by Frostburg State students, will also grow trees to reforest other areas, mostly in Allegany County. The plantings near the headwaters of the Potomac River will help improve water quality downstream and in the Chesapeake Bay, said Craig Hartsock, president of the resource council. “We certainly have a great need for planting trees here in Western Maryland,” he said. “We have a lot of reclaimed strip mines and a lot of active mines and today we’re trying to push more and more reforestation on these lands.”

The EPA funds were matched with \$11,000 each from the local Georges Creek Watershed Association and the federal Appalachian Regional Council, with inkind contributions from agencies including the Maryland State Highway Administration. Sen. Ben Cardin called the project a big deal for the region and the state. “What we’re doing here is preserving what makes Western Maryland so special,” he said. Others were:

- \$209,000 to Staunton, Va., to restore Peyton Creek
- \$163,000 to Waynesboro, Va., for improvements along the South River
- \$150,000 to the Potomac Conservancy to protect 110,000 acres in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.

Pennsylvania's gas-drilling law raises health concerns

ASSOCIATED PRESS PITTSBURGH — Public health advocates and doctors on the front lines of Pennsylvania's natural gas-drilling boom are attacking the state's new Marcellus Shale law, likening one of its provisions to a gag order and complaining that vital research money into health impacts was stripped at the last minute. Doctors say they don't know what to tell patients who suspect their ailments are related to nearby gas industry activity because of a lack of research on whether the drilling of thousands of new wells — many near houses and drinking-water supplies — has made some people sick. Yet when legislative leaders and the governor's office negotiated the most sweeping update of the state's oil and gas law in a quarter century, they stripped \$2 million a year that included funding for a statewide health registry to track respiratory problems, skin conditions, stomach ailments and a host of other illnesses potentially related to gas drilling. Studies are urgently needed to determine if any of the drilling has

affected human health, said Dr. Pouna Saberi, a University of Pennsylvania physician and public health expert. "We don't really have a lot of time," said Saberi, who said she's talked to about 30 people around Pennsylvania over the past 18 months who blame their ailments on gas drilling. Last week, as the controversy simmered, the Department of Health refused to give The Associated Press copies of its responses to people who have complained that drilling had affected their health. That lack of transparency — justified in the name of protecting private medical information — means that the public has no way of knowing even how many complaints there are or how many are valid.

Marcellus Shale drilling forum draws jeers from Bucks County residents

EASTON EXPRESS TIMES In between shouts from a crowd that alleged payoffs, cover ups and lies, state legislators on Thursday in Bucks County tried to explain the benefits of a Marcellus Shale drilling law they approved. Four Bucks County legislators held a forum at Palisades High School County to explain the law, which takes effect Monday. Joining them were other legislators, including the law's author, who was booed, other state officials and science experts. They were confronted by a standing-room-only crowd of more than 200 people who shouted over them and derided their remarks repeatedly throughout the forum. "I feel like I'm wearing a Dallas jersey at an Eagles game," said Andrew Heath, director of the Renew Growing Greener Coalition, one of the state agencies that will receive fees charged to drilling companies based on the amount of gas they extract. The law, known as Act 13, establishes drilling impact fees that Heath said would generate \$480 million in new state revenue through 2015. It also will force drillers to disclose most chemicals they use, and it will require drilling sites to be further from public and private water sources, the officials said. The law governs hydraulic fracturing, sometimes called fracking, a process in which a mixture of water, sand and chemicals is blasted into underground shale deposits to break them and release natural gas. The Marcellus shale deposit that extends from West Virginia to New York through most of Pennsylvania is believed to be the largest natural gas reservoir in North America.

Editorial: Corbett's strategy to protect our health? Keep doctors from talking

EASTON EXPRESS TIMES Was it necessary to gag doctors? That's a question Gov. Tom Corbett and Pennsylvania legislators should be asking themselves after enacting an anemic bill regulating natural gas drilling in Marcellus shale formations. It's bad enough that Corbett and the Republican-dominated legislature ignored sensible calls for an extraction tax. They also stripped municipalities of zoning control over placement of rigs and tanks that store drilling fluids, some of which contain toxic chemicals. Just days before the law was to go into effect (this Saturday) a judge stayed the zoning prohibition, agreeing to hear a lawsuit filed by several towns. There's much more not to like about this law. The state Senate, for example, removed \$2 million before passage that had been earmarked for a statewide registry on potential health problems related to gas drilling. Even worse is the legal muzzle placed on physicians who want to see what chemicals their patients might have been exposed to. A doctor who asks to see the list of chemicals a company is using near a patient's home or workplace must sign a nondisclosure agreement — a form designed to protect the proprietary rights of the driller. Doctors are bound by law not to share this information with patients, other doctors or people analyzing health risks. Giving drilling companies latitude to hide their trade secrets might be good business law, but it's contemptible public health policy. It's probably another example of what happens when legislators let industry representatives write the law for them. It's telling, too, that Corbett's hand-picked task force on gas drilling recommended the creation and funding of a state health registry. The Senate yanked it anyway. The good news, of course, is that gas drilling is creating jobs and filling our energy coffers. Bountiful supplies of natural gas drove the price below \$2 per 1,000 cubic feet this week, a 10-year low. Still, when a governor and lawmakers go above and beyond an industry's expectations in adopting health and zoning regulations, there's little hope that they will revisit something like a gag order on doctors.

W.Va. streams get grant for restoration

CHARLESTON GAZETTE

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A 1.25-mile stretch of Gandy Creek and its headwater tributary streams in Randolph County will be protected through a \$300,000 Environmental Protection Agency grant to American Rivers for work on The Nature Conservancy's Gandy Ranch Project. The project involves building fence to keep cattle out of the Gandy Creek headwaters area within the 455-acre Gandy Ranch area, which lies between the Monongahela National Forest's Laurel Fork Wilderness Area and the Seneca Rocks-Spruce Knob Recreation Area. Eroding stream banks will be stabilized and fish habitat improvement structures will be installed through the grant. The grant will help The Nature Conservancy restore and reconnect red spruce and northern hardwood forests in the Gandy Ranch area through tree-planting and invasive species removal. The property's landowner, Steve Callen, has agreed to permanently protect the Gandy Ranch area through a conservation easement, a legal agreement that restricts future use. "This grant allows American Rivers to not only have a tremendous impact on the health of the region's rivers and clean water, but also on economic prosperity and quality of life," said Chris Williams, senior vice president for conservation at American Rivers. "We congratulate The Nature Conservancy and partners on their hard work and innovative ideas, and we look forward to seeing the many benefits to clean water and people." Other groups involved in the project include Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Forest Service, the Mountain Institute and the Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative.

More C8 results due, medical testing panel formed

CHARLESTON GAZETTE

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- As one panel of experts prepared to release more key findings about C8's impacts on human health, a second trio of scientists has been appointed to sort out what sort of medical monitoring would help Mid-Ohio Valley residents exposed to toxic chemical by DuPont co. On Thursday, lawyers for DuPont and the residents announced the formation of a "medical panel" set up as part of the landmark settlement of a class-action lawsuit against the company. Panel members include Dr. Dean Baker, a professor of medicine at the University of California at Irvine; Dr. Melissa McDiarmid, a professor of medicine at the University of Maryland; and Dr. Harold Sox, a professor of medicine at Dartmouth College. In a joint statement, DuPont lawyer Libretta P. Stennes and Rob Bilott, a lawyer for the residents, said panel members were all "independent, well-qualified and respected doctors." Medical panel members will decide what sort of future medical testing DuPont must fund to help provide residents of the Parkersburg area with early detection of any ailments that the separate "C8 Science Panel" determines have a "probable link" to chemical exposure. In December, the Science Panel released its first probable link findings, reporting after a year-study study that scientific evidence shows C8 exposure likely causes high blood pressure among pregnant women.

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Doctors object to secrecy in Pa.'s new natural gas law When Pennsylvania's new natural gas law, which takes effect Saturday, was being debated, the focus was on high-profile issues such as the new impact fee. But just before it passed, medical provisions were added that now have some physicians worried it will compromise public health. Except in an emergency, a physician who needs proprietary information about chemicals used in natural gas drilling to assess a patient must provide "a written statement" to a company, according to the act, and must sign a confidentiality agreement. Some doctors are calling it a "gag law" because, as they read the act, the confidentiality agreement could limit them from sharing information about the chemicals with colleagues and perhaps even patients. They also say the law's chemical-disclosure requirements are weak, giving the industry too many loopholes. The law's proponents disagree, saying that rather than putting up roadblocks, the law removes them. Adam M. Finkel, who directs the University of Pennsylvania's Program on Regulation, called the bill an "ominous piece of work." From his initial reading, Finkel, who headed rule-making at the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration during the Clinton administration, said that "it's really not at all clear" what a physician could tell a patient. If "not much" is the answer, "obviously, as a regulator and public health advocate, I would be appalled." The head of the Pennsylvania Medical Society and the medical director of the Poison Control Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia expressed similar concerns.

PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

W.Va. Sen. Rockefeller hearing on shale gas development focuses on road safety FAIRMONT, W.Va. -- The brief testimony of a West Virginia sheriff Wednesday was enough to put the Marcellus Shale industry on the defensive as Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., probed companies on who is driving the heavy trucks that dominate his state's roadways. Marshall County Sheriff John Gruzinskas said he oversees a staff strapped by investigations into driving problems that have come with out-of-state drivers trying to navigate West Virginia's winding, one-lane roads. "They go through people's yards. They tear up people's fences," said Mr. Gruzinskas, speaking at a field hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. Mr. Rockefeller chairs the committee. A majority of the 11 testimonies delivered came from industry boosters, but Mr. Gruzinskas's detailing of disruptions -- such as elderly drivers being run off the road -- became a referendum on who is behind the wheel. More seemed to be at stake than the well-being of Marshall County drivers. West Virginia lost a high-profile competition for a Shell Oil Co. facility last month to Pennsylvania, and company concerns over the state's infrastructure were cited as a reason. The state, meanwhile, sits above just the kind of lucrative gas that could attract other petrochemical facilities and the jobs and investment that come with them. Mr. Rockefeller's committee focuses on infrastructure issues such as roads and pipelines, but it was Mr. Gruzinskas's testimony of shale drivers who don't care about West Virginia that most concerned the senator.

Study finds that wastewater from gas wells caused quakes The U.S. Geological Survey is getting ready to publish a report that the oil and gas industry is the reason behind recent earthquakes. Bill Ellsworth, from the U.S. Geological Survey, spoke to NPR about the man-made earthquakes caused by wastewater well disposal:

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE REVIEW

Judge halts Pennsylvania law on shale oversight Local officials applauded a state court decision on Wednesday to delay implementation of part of the new state law governing Marcellus shale natural gas well drilling. Commonwealth Court Senior Judge Keith Quigley issued a 120-day injunction that will postpone the provisions of Act 13 relating to local zoning regulations. The law, which was approved in February and goes into effect on Saturday, established impact fees on drilling operations in exchange for setting universal land-use standards that could override regulations established by local officials. The injunction delays only the land-use aspects of the law while a lawsuit filed by several communities challenging its constitutionality works its way through the courts. "It's the best news I've heard in quite awhile," said Ron Slabe, an Upper Burrell resident who is a vocal advocate for more stringent environmental, safety and zoning regulations on the burgeoning Marcellus industry. "Act 13 is probably the most Draconian law in the whole country relating to natural gas," said Slabe. "It strips away local communities' rights." A member of Local Authority Western PA (LawPA), a coalition of residents who object to state laws that take away local control of natural gas operations, Slabe said they are asking community leaders to sign letters protesting Act 13 and supporting the lawsuit.

ALLENTOWN MORNING CALL

Pennsylvania's gas-drilling law raises health concerns PITTSBURGH — Public health advocates and doctors on the front lines of Pennsylvania's natural gas-drilling boom are attacking the state's new Marcellus Shale law, likening one of its provisions to a gag order and complaining that vital research money into health impacts was stripped at the last minute. Doctors say they don't know what to tell patients who suspect their ailments are related to nearby gas industry activity because of a lack of research on whether the drilling of thousands of new wells — many near houses and drinking-water supplies — has made some people sick. Yet when legislative leaders and the governor's office negotiated the most sweeping update of the state's oil and gas law in a quarter century, they stripped \$2 million a year that included funding for a statewide health registry to track respiratory problems, skin conditions, stomach ailments and a host of other illnesses potentially related to gas drilling. Studies are urgently needed to determine if any of the drilling has affected human health, said Dr. Poune Saberi, a University of Pennsylvania physician and public health expert. "We don't really have a lot of time," said Saberi, who said she's talked to about 30 people around Pennsylvania over the past 18 months who blame their ailments on gas drilling. Last week, as the controversy simmered, the Department of Health refused to give The Associated Press copies of its responses to people who have complained that drilling had affected their health. That lack of transparency — justified in the name of protecting private medical information — means that the public has no way of knowing even how many complaints there are or how many are valid.

WILKES-BARRE CITIZENS VOICE

Cabot plans CNG station for its vehicles in Dimock By the end of May, Cabot Oil & Gas will have a fueling station for its fleet of vehicles that can operate on compressed natural gas, or CNG, a company spokesman George Stark told the Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce during a Wednesday luncheon. He said Cabot was in the process of converting its fleet of vehicles over to operating on CNG. Cabot will have a CNG fueling station in Dimock Twp. to supply its vehicles, which can operate on gasoline or CNG. George Stark also said at the luncheon the company will scale back its production efforts. "In 2012, we're not going to spend \$600 million," he said. "We're only going to spend \$500 million." Cabot had 177 wells in Susquehanna County and 15 of the 20 top producing wells in Pennsylvania. Asked by local businessman Jay Niskey if Marcellus gas could be sent to Virginia via lines designed to import gas from the Gulf, Mr. Stark said anything is possible. He acknowledged recently Cabot announced a joint venture with Williams Partners to develop and construct a large-diameter pipeline, specifically designed to transport Cabot's Marcellus production to both the New England and New York markets. Deemed the "Constitution Pipeline" this high pressure pipeline will be capable of moving at least 500,000 Mcf per day from the heart of Cabot's Marcellus acreage in Susquehanna County to interconnect with both Iroquois Gas Transmission and Tennessee Gas Pipeline in Schoharie County, N.Y. He said the move should be good for upstate New Yorkers who are importing high-priced Canadian gas. Regarding the impact fee recently approved in Susquehanna County, Mr. Stark said Cabot was expecting to pay a little more than \$9 million. Using the funding formula the Legislature created for sharing monies with municipalities, Mr. Stark said he would not be surprised to see townships like Dimock or Springville getting the equivalent of half their budgets.

WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

More gas lines needed to reach rural communities The Marcellus Shale cuts a wide swath across the state, including much of rural Pennsylvania. Interestingly enough, many residents whose homes sit above the natural gas resource have no access to it. The reason? The price of building pipelines to sparsely populated rural areas is very costly. State Sen. E. Eugene Yaw, R-Loyalsock Township, and state Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, took part in a discussion this week to consider the issue. Yaw, who serves as chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, hosted the session in Bradford County attended by officials from the gas industry and government agencies. "Twenty years ago they said we would run out of natural gas, so they weren't extending gas lines," Yaw said. "Now, we found out the opposite is true." Yaw and Everett said heating with natural gas is cheap, but until gas lines are extended to more parts of the state, many rural homeowners and businesses will not have that choice. "For a consumer, it's a no-brainer," Everett said. Everett noted that in Muncy, for example, a gas line runs down Main Street but to no other parts of the borough. "How can we increase distribution of natural gas to rural parts of Pennsylvania?" Yaw asked. "There are areas right here in Williamsport without gas." State Rep. Rick Mirabito, D-Williamsport, agreed. "Obviously, we need to make sure that communities where gas is being removed, that we make them accessible to the gas, so they don't have to depend on other natural resources," Mirabito said. "Unfortunately, I was not able to be at that meeting, but I fully support efforts to make natural gas accessible to places where it's being removed."

ERIE TIMES-NEWS

Hatchery test reveals disease, but 'most of the trout are fine' Anglers hesitant to jump into trout season because of the possibility of diseased fish being stocked in the region's waterways need not worry. More than 10,000 trout were moved to 10-acre Upper Gravel Pit in Fairview Township after hatchery testing revealed infectious pancreatic necrosis, a viral disease of salmonids that can result in swelling, darkened skin and death in affected fish. "Most of the trout are fine, but because a few tested positive, we removed all of the fish because that could be a real problem for a hatchery," said Chuck Murray, fisheries biologist for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Lake Erie Research Unit. "We have to emphatically stress that the disease is only specific to fish, not to humans who consume them," he said. 3-C-U Cooperative Trout Nursery volunteers started stocking Upper Gravel Pit in early March. Earl Myers, manager of the Fish and Boat Commission's cooperative nursery unit, said more than 10,000 brown trout, 125 rainbows and 100 golden rainbows had been stocked as of mid-March, when the Commission put out a public invitation to anglers to fish the site at Fairview's Maple Street and Blair Road. Anglers reeled in trout virtually by the minute before the site closed to fishing April 1. Upper Gravel Pit is part of the Early Season Trout-Stocked Waters program, which allows fishing in March, when most other trout waters in the state are closed. "I would take a lunch and sit by the Gravel Pit just to watch, and they were catching them left and right," Murray said. "They knew they were safe to eat, or could just throw

them back in for someone else to catch." The site also was stocked with brown trout Tuesday in anticipation of Saturday's statewide opening day of trout season, and is scheduled to be stocked again April 24. Murray provided assurance that the recent stocking was made with healthy trout. "Most were not diseased, but by our agreement with other agencies in the Great Lakes region, we don't stock fish who are diseased or possibly infected," Murray said

WFMZ-TV ALLENTOWN/READING

Tempers flare at Marcellus Shale drilling forum NOCKAMIXON TWP., Pa. -Anyone who went to Palisades High School in northern Bucks County Thursday night for an "educational forum" about Act 13, Pennsylvania's new Marcellus Shale law, was in for a bumpy night. It was not civility's finest two hours. The dozen people at the front of the room -- including six state legislators and a deputy secretary from the state Department of Environmental Protection -- faced a constant barrage of shouted questions and loud sarcastic remarks. Some accused the speakers of lying, others accused them of being paid off by the natural gas industry. People didn't like having to submit written questions to the panel. Some just stood up and shouted out their questions and sometimes succeeded in getting answers. Certainly not all of the estimated 300 people packed into the high school's cafeteria were unruly. In fact, some got tired of those who were telling them to be quiet, sit down and "let the man speak." A visibly angry State Rep. Brian Ellis of Butler County, author of Act 13, said he did not drive 300 miles to be yelled at by someone. "A lot of the folks here have been kind and courteous and wrote down their questions and the panel is here to answer the questions, which is what I'm trying to do," Ellis said. "I feel like I'm wearing a Dallas jersey at an Eagles game," said Andrew Heath, executive director of the state's Renew Growing Greener Coalition, who also spoke.

EASTON EXPRESS TIMES (LEHIG VALLEY LIVE)

Editorial: Corbett's strategy to protect our health? Keep doctors from talking Was it necessary to gag doctors? That's a question Gov. Tom Corbett and Pennsylvania legislators should be asking themselves after enacting an anemic bill regulating natural gas drilling in Marcellus shale formations. It's bad enough that Corbett and the Republican-dominated legislature ignored sensible calls for an extraction tax. They also stripped municipalities of zoning control over placement of rigs and tanks that store drilling fluids, some of which contain toxic chemicals. Just days before the law was to go into effect (this Saturday) a judge stayed the zoning prohibition, agreeing to hear a lawsuit filed by several towns. There's much more not to like about this law. The state Senate, for example, removed \$2 million before passage that had been earmarked for a statewide registry on potential health problems related to gas drilling. Even worse is the legal muzzle placed on physicians who want to see what chemicals their patients might have been exposed to. A doctor who asks to see the list of chemicals a company is using near a patient's home or workplace must sign a nondisclosure agreement — a form designed to protect the proprietary rights of the driller. Doctors are bound by law not to share this information with patients, other doctors or people analyzing health risks. Giving drilling companies latitude to hide their trade secrets might be good business law, but it's contemptible public health policy. It's probably another example of what happens when legislators let industry representatives write the law for them. It's telling, too, that Corbett's hand-picked task force on gas drilling recommended the creation and funding of a state health registry. The Senate yanked it anyway. The good news, of course, is that gas drilling is creating jobs and filling our energy coffers.

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most of Pennsylvania is believed to be the largest natural gas reservoir in North America. _

TOWANDA DAILY REVIEW

Impact fee established TOWANDA - Bradford County now has an impact fee on gas drilling. The Bradford County Commissioners on Thursday passed an ordinance which establishes an impact fee on Marcellus Shale gas wells in the county, and discussed some of their ideas on how to spend the millions of dollars in revenue from the fee that will be coming to the county government each year. "It is a huge change for the county" to have the impact fee in place, Bradford County Commissioner Mark Smith said. "We'll have funding for our county that we didn't have before" to address local impacts from gas drilling without having to raise property taxes to pay for them, he said. All three Bradford County commissioners voted for the ordinance. The commissioners' conference room was packed with residents and township officials at the time of the vote. During the public comment portion of the commissioners' meeting, Smithfield Township Supervisor John Allford said that the establishment of an impact fee in Pennsylvania is "greed taking precedence over common sense ... It is not good for Bradford County or the citizens of this state." But Smith said the Bradford County Commissioners were not motivated by greed in levying the fee.

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Pa.)

Pa.'s most heavily drilled county approves Marcellus Shale well fee HARRISBURG, Pa. — Commissioners in Pennsylvania's most heavily drilled county have approved a per-well drilling fee on the booming natural gas industry. Chairman Doug McLinko said Bradford County's three commissioners unanimously approved the fee on Thursday, although McLinko says he's not happy about it. Otherwise, he says, just 13 of the county's 51 municipalities could claim all the revenue from the county's well fees by virtue of having more than half of the county's population. But he says the state's eight-week-old law left the county with no choice but to approve the fee, which fluctuates with the price of natural gas and inflation. Otherwise, he says, just 13 of the county's 51 municipalities could claim all the revenue from the county's well fees by virtue of having more than half of the county's population. He says that could create hard feelings in the county. Bradford joins 31 counties that already have reported to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission that they approved a fee ordinance.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

WASHINGTON POST

Fairfax, Arlington and Loudoun counties are healthiest in Va., survey says Residents of Northern Virginia, when comparing themselves with residents in the rest of the state, take pride in the quality of their schools, their economic strength, their big-city sophistication — and now, in their healthy lifestyles. An annual report from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which ranks nearly every county or city in the United States, found the state's healthiest population in Fairfax County, followed by Arlington and Loudoun counties. Details on each community and rankings are at www.countyhealthrankings.org. The rankings, in their third year, are based on publicly available data that show premature death rates, adults in poor physical or mental health and the number of low-birth-weight babies. The researchers also looked at a variety of measures contributing to a poor health picture overall, such as the rate of people dying before age 75, high school graduation rates, access to health care and healthy foods, air pollution levels, income and rates of smoking, obesity and teen births. When those factors are considered, Loudoun residents leapfrog to the top of Virginia's ranks, Fairfax falls to fifth place, and Arlington slides to third. But given the 135 Virginia communities measured, those are all top spots.

WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON GAZETTE

More C8 results due, medical testing panel formed CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- As one panel of experts prepared to release more key findings about C8's impacts on human health, a second trio of scientists has been appointed to sort out

what sort of medical monitoring would help Mid-Ohio Valley residents exposed to toxic chemical by DuPont co. On Thursday, lawyers for DuPont and the residents announced the formation of a "medical panel" set up as part of the landmark settlement of a class-action lawsuit against the company. Panel members include Dr. Dean Baker, a professor of medicine at the University of California at Irvine; Dr. Melissa McDiarmid, a professor of medicine at the University of Maryland; and Dr. Harold Sox, a professor of medicine at Dartmouth College. In a joint statement, DuPont lawyer Libretta P. Stennes and Rob Bilott, a lawyer for the residents, said panel members were all "independent, well-qualified and respected doctors." Medical panel members will decide what sort of future medical testing DuPont must fund to help provide residents of the Parkersburg area with early detection of any ailments that the separate "C8 Science Panel" determines have a "probable link" to chemical exposure. In December, the Science Panel released its first probable link findings, reporting after a year-study study that scientific evidence shows C8 exposure likely causes high blood pressure among pregnant women.

Commentary: W.Va. is in position to soar CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- At a time when the national unemployment rate stands at 8.3 percent and 24 million Americans are unemployed, under-employed or have given up looking for work, West Virginia finds itself in an enviable position. Unlike many other states, we are blessed with abundant natural resources that can be harnessed to create jobs and increase U.S. energy security. One key to West Virginia's energy potential is technology, especially hydraulic fracturing which is unlocking oil and natural gas from deep hard-rock formations, including the Marcellus Shale. Today, the United States has more natural gas and oil than was estimated just a decade ago. The use of hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus and other shale formations has prompted the U.S. Energy Information Administration to estimate that the United States has about a 100-year supply of natural gas. As supplies have increased, the price of natural gas has fallen below \$3 per thousand cubic feet, helping consumers and energy-intensive industries control their costs. Hydraulic fracturing also is credited with increasing U.S. oil production. The EIA projects the United States will produce 6.7 million barrels of oil per day by 2020, up from 5.5 million barrels per day in 2010. And increased domestic oil supplies could have an impact on prices, which once again are rising. "For years, analysts have worried that known oil reserves have peaked, so that prices will keep rising," writes Peter Orszag of Citigroup. Hydraulic fracturing "could change that dynamic," he adds. If Orszag is correct, oil prices could decline and the United States could be poised to take control of its own energy destiny. With the right policies, including approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, American consumers could have a future without fear of 1970s-style oil embargoes or the saber-rattling of foreign despots. And by producing more of its own oil and natural gas, it could create 1.4 million jobs without a government handout, according to a Wood Mackenzie study.

W.Va. streams get grant for restoration CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A 1.25-mile stretch of Gandy Creek and its headwater tributary streams in Randolph County will be protected through a \$300,000 Environmental Protection Agency grant to American Rivers for work on The Nature Conservancy's Gandy Ranch Project. The project involves building fence to keep cattle out of the Gandy Creek headwaters area within the 455-acre Gandy Ranch area, which lies between the Monongahela National Forest's Laurel Fork Wilderness Area and the Seneca Rocks-Spruce Knob Recreation Area. Eroding stream banks will be stabilized and fish habitat improvement structures will be installed through the grant. The grant will help The Nature Conservancy restore and reconnect red spruce and northern hardwood forests in the Gandy Ranch area through tree-planting and invasive species removal. The property's landowner, Steve Callen, has agreed to permanently protect the Gandy Ranch area through a conservation easement, a legal agreement that restricts future use. "This grant allows American Rivers to not only have a tremendous impact on the health of the region's rivers and clean water, but also on economic prosperity and quality of life," said Chris Williams, senior vice president for conservation at American Rivers. "We congratulate The Nature Conservancy and partners on their hard work and innovative ideas, and we look forward to seeing the many benefits to clean water and people." Other groups involved in the project include Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Forest Service, the Mountain Institute and the Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative.

Blog: Sen. Joe Manchin, common sense and coal: Where the heck does he get some of this stuff? We don't really know what Sen. Joe Manchin talked about with his buddies from the coal industry. Yesterday's meeting was held behind closed doors out at Walker Machinery. But we did get a taste of it in a media availability and a statement issued by Sen. Manchin's press office. Most if it was predictable, like this: Senator Manchin described how he's fighting new overly burdensome emissions rules that are forcing power plants to close prematurely and preventing new coal-fired plants from being built, unrealistic timetables for implementing additional rules, the backlog of permits, and EPA's interference with state permitting programs

Oldest table mountain pine in Pendleton CIRCLEVILLE, W.Va. -- Ancient trees are not always towering giants, as pictured in postcard scenes of old-growth California redwoods with car-accommodating tunnels hacked through their massive trunks. The world's oldest living table mountain pine is a case in point. The 271-year-old specimen was recently discovered during a study on the history of fire on The Nature Conservancy of West Virginia's Pike Knob Preserve in Pendleton County. Another example is the oldest-known eastern red cedar, a 940-year-old, now-dead tree identified several years ago at nearby Smoke Hole Canyon, and used in a recent study on regional drought during the past millennium.

WHEELING INTELLIGENCER

Hopes Pinned On Another Cracker Plant FAIRMONT, W.Va. - The liquids-rich Marcellus and Utica shale gas underlying northern West Virginia could still help the state land at least one ethane cracker, jumpstarting the state's manufacturing sector, officials believe. "We have the building blocks, a trained chemical workforce, abundant supplies of ethane-rich natural gas, and a robust infrastructure," said West Virginia Secretary of Commerce Keith Burdette. "Just from an operational picture, a world class cracker will likely require an investment from \$3 billion to \$5 billion." Burdette spoke during the Wednesday special hearing of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in Fairmont. Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., serves as chairman of this Senate committee, while Reps. David McKinley and Shelley Moore Capito, both R-W.Va., joined Rockefeller for the session. Although Burdette admits that Royal Dutch Shell's recent announcement to build the cracker plant along the Ohio River northwest of Pittsburgh was disappointing, he stressed the Mountain State is still going to benefit - and could still land a plant of its own.

PARKERSBURG NEWS AND SENTINEL

Sen. Manchin visits DuPont on jobs tour WASHINGTON, W.Va.- As part of his tour across the state to help grow and preserve jobs, U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., stopped at the DuPont Washington Works Thursday. "I want to find out what opportunities we have here to grow and maintain the jobs we have and attract more jobs," Manchin said. "And, to ask how the government can help." Manchin said the usual answer is the government's help is not needed. "Usually they'll say 'get out of our way and let us do our job, help us that way,'" he said. "That's the message I'll take back to Washington on what is needed to create jobs."

ASSOCIATED PRESS (W. Va.)

EPA, environmental group team up on river projects CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is funding six river restoration projects in a four-state region. The environmental group American Rivers is implementing a program funded by EPA grants for projects in a 79,000-square-mile region encompassing Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. The Washington, D.C.-based group, which works to protect the nation's rivers, and the EPA will unveil the recipients of \$1.4 million in grants today at Maryland's Frostburg State University.

W.Va. gets federal labor grant for storm cleanup CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The U.S. Department of Labor has awarded a \$514,800 grant to provide temporary job opportunities to displaced workers for cleanup and recovery efforts from severe storms in West Virginia earlier this year. The grant was awarded Thursday to WorkForce West Virginia for assistance in Harrison, Lincoln, Logan, Marion, Mingo, Taylor and Wayne counties. More counties may be included at a later date. National Emergency Grants are part of U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis' discretionary fund. They provide resources to quickly re-employ laid-off workers by offering training to increase job skills.

W.Va. wind farm operator to install sound mufflers KEYSER, W.Va. (AP) - The owners of a wind farm near Keyser will invest \$500,000 on new sound muffling devices they say have successfully addressed noise complaints. The Mineral Daily News-Tribune (<http://bit.ly/I4zMCZ>) says Edison Mission Group will equip all 23 turbines at the Pinnacle Wind Farm with the recently tested devices. The work should be done in June. Vice president Charley Parnell says EMG is committed to being a responsible corporate citizen. In February, resident Richard Braithwaite filed a protest over the noise with the West Virginia Public Service Commission. Earlier this month, PSC staff agreed that the complaint deserved review. Braithwaite says he welcomes the sound mufflers but they don't solve the problem. He says they will address the high-pitched sounds from cooling equipment but the blades themselves still make noise

W.Va. hearing explores gas development challenges FAIRMONT, W.Va. — Industry and community leaders are in Fairmont for a U.S. Senate field hearing on the growing shale-gas industry. Sen. Jay Rockefeller chairs the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. He wants to focus the hearing on transportation, pipeline, railroad and other issues that affect both the industry and West Virginia residents. Rockefeller says he wants to see the development of the Marcellus shale reserves work, but he wants the roads to be safe for people as it does. The West Virginia Democrat says he wants to hear what's being done right and what's being done wrong. He also wants to know whether the state can handle the complaints it receives and do something about it. More than 1,000 people were invited to Wednesday's hearing, but only about 100 showed up.

MARYLAND

BALTIMORE SUN

Stream cleaning frenzy on tap Saturday Project Clean Stream aims for 200-plus cleanups. Spring cleaning season is upon us, and Saturday there'll be a whole lotta cleaning goin' on along water ways around B'more..

SALISBURY DAILY TIMES

SOMERSET: Outdoor burning ban in effect PRINCESS ANNE — The Somerset County Commissioners have imposed a ban on all outdoor burning within the county, with the exception of propane or charcoal grills. The order became effective immediately and will be in effect until further notice.

ANNAPOLIS CAPITAL

Warm winter points to buggy summer The mild winter and record-setting warm spring may have helped area plants and trees bloom faster, but it could come at a price: a potentially buggy summer that could affect everyone from home gardeners to farmers. The mild winter was helpful for bugs that rode out the colder months in soil that did not freeze as often because of above-average temperatures, University of Maryland entomologist Mike Raupp said.

SOUTHERN MARYLAND NEWSPAPERS

Session serves up mixed bag for environment Some much-publicized proposals pitched as environmental initiatives by the governor and legislators failed during the General Assembly session that adjourned Monday, while others advanced in full or partially. Whether some of the measures might be put on the table in a special session of the legislature remained unclear, said Takirra Winfield, a spokeswoman for Gov. Martin O'Malley (D). The governor has said he is waiting to hear whether Senate and House leaders have resolved their differences to pass a budget that would warrant calling the legislature back to Annapolis. Controversial initiatives such as trying to jump-start the development of offshore wind farms with a subsidy from electricity ratepayers and restricting septic system use were expected to take a few years, Winfield said. But the administration is pleased to see progress on both in their second time on legislators' desks. "This is a priority for the governor, we are going to continue to talk about wind," Winfield said of a proposal aimed at creating a wind farm off the coast of Ocean City and wind energy business in the state. A measure to that effect cleared the House on a 88-47 vote. But the bill failed to get a vote in the Senate Finance Committee, despite polls that showed the public's willingness to pay up to \$2 extra per month on household electric bills. Attempts to ensure that Maryland is spared any ill effects from the controversial drilling practice known as hydraulic fracturing to tap natural gas trapped in shale thousands of feet underground also suffered setbacks. A measure to impose a fee on leases to fund a study did not get a vote in the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee.

WBOC-TV 16 DELMARVA

Diesel Fuel Prices Could Put A Damper on Crabbing Season CAMBRIDGE, Md. - Two weeks into crabbing season and there are still plenty of crabbing pots sitting on shore. High gas prices are to blame, according to many watermen. Crabs have not made their way to the northern part of the Chesapeake Bay just yet, leaving some watermen like Scott Todd no choice but to remain docked. "I can't afford to travel down to the lower part of the bay to look for crabs," Todd said. "There are a few crabs there now but it's too expensive to run down there and we just can't sail down there on speculation." At the Gateway Marina in Trappe, Md., the price for a gallon of diesel fuel is just under \$4.

Some watermen say if the price continues to rise, they will not be able to stay afloat. "We burn anywhere from 30 to 50 gallons a day so if it's over \$4 a gallon, that's between \$180 and \$200 a day," said Todd. Cambridge watermen Harry Insley finds himself in the same boat. He said watermen will not catch enough crabs to make paying for diesel fuel worth their while. "It's got to be a lot of crabs to make up for it," said Insley. "I don't see that happening this year." Watermen will be less likely to travel long distances with gas prices so high. Harry said that could mean more competition out on the water. "For where I am, it makes for a lot more competition," he said. And for some watermen, their long days just got even longer. They are saving gas, but not saving time. "We're leaving the docks a little bit earlier and so we're taking a slower ride to the pots just to save fuel," Todd said.

CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE (Univ. of Md.)

Economists say Maryland needs wind energy, but fracking more Maryland energy policy remains in limbo, without major progress on offshore wind or hydraulic fracturing during the recent General Assembly session. A bill that would have brought wind turbines to the state's Atlantic coast collapsed for a second year in a row. And hydraulic fracturing, a natural-gas extraction process commonly called fracking, is on hold while an advisory commission examines its potential impacts. Both energy solutions inspire passion in the state's legislators. Democrats overwhelmingly support offshore wind, with its promise of long-term renewable energy, while Republicans mostly favor hydraulic fracturing's lower startup investment and quick profits. But economists versed in energy policy argue that political bickering should not overshadow the issue at hand: Maryland needs to find new solutions for its energy future. They say the state should consider a range of resources — not just offshore wind and natural gas, but land-based wind, solar, geothermal and nuclear, too. The state currently imports about 30% of the electricity it consumes, according to a Public Service Commission report. That makes Maryland the fourth largest energy importer in the nation by percentage — trailing only D.C., Virginia and Delaware. Officials are working toward a third nuclear reactor at Calvert Cliffs in Calvert County, which would be the first new reactor approved in the country in a generation. Charles Ebinger, director of the Brookings Institution's Energy Security Initiative, said polarized debate among legislators has created a false sense of having to choose between two distinct options.

Md. metal scrap law has holes WASHINGTON ---- They've robbed graves and construction sites, churches and schools. They've taken statues from bases and ordinary pipes right out of the walls ---- but even a new law designed to curb these scrap metal thieves seems to barely slow them down. Brian Sclar, the president of the metal recycling business Frederick Reliable, has his workers follow the law ---- viewing and recording full identification of sellers and photographing all the scrap they're selling ---- but said it doesn't seem to have put a dent in the problem. "I don't think it has been a huge deterrent," he said, referring to the number of copper thefts in Maryland. "But I do think it has been very effective in solving a number of copper theft crimes."

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Md.)

Feds fund plant production on old mine land FROSTBURG (AP) — A Western Maryland mountaintop once strip-mined for coal will produce tree seedlings to reforest eroding stream banks across the region under a federally funded project announced Thursday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The four greenhouses on a five-acre, reclaimed surface mine near Frostburg also may be used to grow other native plants and food for Frostburg State University students, officials said at an oncampus news conference. The environmental group American Rivers will implement the \$300,000 EPA grant awarded to the Western Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Council. The project is among six in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia that the EPA is funding at a total of nearly \$1.4 million through its Highlands Action Program. "These projects stand to create lasting benefits for communities throughout the highlands region," EPA Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin said. "The six projects selected for EPA's funding will provide protection, conservation and restoration improvements that will benefit the environment, create jobs and maintain the cultural heritage of this vital region." The greenhouses should be in operation this year on acreage leased from the Allegany Coal and Land Co., officials said. The reclaimed land was previously used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to store hundreds of mobile homes meant to shelter disaster victims. Trees grown and planted on the barren, gravel-covered site will prevent sediment from washing into nearby Braddock Run, officials said. The greenhouse complex, staffed by two full-time workers and tended by Frostburg State students, will also grow trees to reforest other areas, mostly in Allegany County. The plantings near the headwaters of the Potomac River will help improve water quality downstream and in the Chesapeake Bay, said Craig Hartsock, president of the resource council. "We certainly have a great need for planting trees here in Western

Maryland," he said. "We have a lot of reclaimed strip mines and a lot of active mines and today we're trying to push more and more reforestation on these lands."

The EPA funds were matched with \$11,000 each from the local Georges Creek Watershed Association and the federal Appalachian Regional Council, with inkind contributions from agencies including the Maryland State Highway Administration. Sen. Ben Cardin called the project a big deal for the region and the state. "What we're doing here is preserving what makes Western Maryland so special," he said. Others were:

- \$209,000 to Staunton, Va., to restore Peyton Creek
- \$163,000 to Waynesboro, Va., for improvements along the South River
- \$150,000 to the Potomac Conservancy to protect 110,000 acres in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

O'Malley accepts part of blame for budget ANNAPOLIS -- After a wildly surprising budget meltdown this week in Maryland's Legislature, Gov. Martin O'Malley said Thursday he accepts some responsibility for the failure to replace \$512 million in spending cuts with a package including tax hikes and alternate savings, and he expressed uncertainty about when -- or even if -- he would call a special session to try again. The Democratic governor also made the painful admission that the state's vastly outnumbered Republicans have prevailed by default so far in this year's budget debate due to a lack of Democratic leadership, including his own. The Maryland Senate has 35 Democrats and 12 Republicans. The House of Delegates has 98 Democrats and 43 Republicans.

VIRGINIA

NORFOLK VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Wildfires burn more than 20,000 acres in Virginia COVINGTON Firefighters continue to battle wildfires that have burned more than 20,000 acres in Virginia. The largest fire is in a remote area in Alleghany County 10 miles west of Covington. The U.S. Forest Service says more than 7,600 acres have burned since Saturday. Another fire in Page County is more than 6 miles long and has burned 5,400 acres.

ROANOKE TIMES

Chlorine kills fish near Christiansburg treatment plant A procedure at Christiansburg's wastewater treatment plant led to 12 pounds of chlorine killing several hundred fish, Allen Linkenhoker with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality said Thursday. The spill happened Tuesday afternoon during a procedure to identify a leak, town spokeswoman Becky Wilburn said. Chlorine was used to pinpoint the leak, which led to it spilling into Crab Creek, she said. Wilburn said the town then called DEQ to report it. Linkenhoker said the problem was addressed. DEQ is awaiting a final count from biologists on the number of fish killed. It is not considered a major incident at this point, Linkenhoker said. Reports indicate that approximately half a mile of stream was affected, Linkenhoker said. Wilburn said the town regrets that an error occurred and is taking steps to ensure it doesn't happen again

Wildfires burning 20,000 acres in national forest areas Crews fighting major Southwest Virginia wildfires are now battling blazes that, collectively, have reached historic proportions — and have led officials to close some surrounding areas to the public. "Right now, when you look at the entire George Washington National Forest, we have 20,000 acres on fire," said Pat Sheridan, head ranger for the Warm Springs and James River district of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. "The largest fire prior to this might've been something approaching 5,000 acres," Sheridan added. "Now we have numerous fires all at one time." The three largest fires near the Roanoke area — at Alleghany Tunnels, Rich Hole and Barbours Creek — all grew significantly between Wednesday and Thursday. The fire at Alleghany Tunnels, about 10 miles west of Covington, increased from 6,000 acres to more than 7,650; Rich Hole, 17 miles east of Covington, went from 1,000 to 3,670 acres; and the Barbours Creek fire expanded from 1,750 to almost 2,700 acres, officials reported. A fourth fire, sparked by lightning and burning on Cove Mountain near Arcadia in Botetourt County, has for the past two days stayed the same size, at 57 acres, forest spokeswoman JoBeth Brown said Thursday. Crews are also fighting two wilderness fires covering an estimated 7,000 acres in Rockingham County in Virginia and Hardy County in West Virginia. Officials on Thursday also closed off public areas near the fires. "We've implemented closures around each of the wildfires for all of the public. It's obviously for safety reasons," Brown said. "Anything adjacent to the fires is going to be closed. Anything around a wildfire." Brown said the specific closings

would be mapped on the Forest Service's website, but those updates were still in progress Thursday evening. Sheridan also said firefighters in the second half of the week were seeing slight breaks from the weather, with still-low humidity levels climbing just a little higher and winds diminishing somewhat. Humidity below 30 percent is considered low for the area, he said.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA DAILY

Hometown Strasburg plans clean-up STRASBURG -- Larry Haun is warning litter bugs that spring cleaning hits town next week. Hometown Strasburg plans to hold its second annual town-wide Clean-Up Day April 21. Organizers intend to focus their efforts on areas around the roads leading into and out of Strasburg as well as streets in the town limits. "I hope it will make the town look much better and I hope it will instill some pride in the town," said Haun, chairman of the group's clean-up day committee.. The town needs a clean-up, according to Haun. "All you have to do is drive out Route 11 south and go up Fishers Hill, look carefully on either side of the road, drive out to Route 55 west, look on either side of the road, drive almost any road that leaves Strasburg and you will find it littered with trash," Haun said. U.S. 11 northbound toward the Interstate 81 interchange is "heavily littered," according to Haun. Pockets of litter exist around Strasburg as well and Haun recalled recently cleaning up much of the town's west end, where he collected 15 bags of trash.

VIRGINIA CONNECTION NEWSPAPERS

Letter: Clear Cutting Of Trees This morning I watched as contractors for WMATA cut down tree after tree after tree along the property line adjacent to my apartment complex. The Metro Office of Systems Maintenance property at 195 Telegraph Road (actually Mill Road), Alexandria, runs along a creek bed, where all the trees are being clear cut. This creek bed is a tributary to Taylor Run, part of the Potomac Watershed, ultimately contributing to the Chesapeake Bay. The foreman of the company contracted to cut down the trees shook his head as he informed me that WMATA was clearing trees on all of their properties across the Washington Metro area. Why? At least along this creek bed there is no apparent need. No electrical lines, no criminal activity. (Unless you count the leaves dropping on the employees' cars in the WMATA parking lot as criminal). In fact the opposite is true. The trees provided a privacy screen between the residential apartments and the unsightly metro yard building and parking lot behind it. The creek bed was a small, but vital area of nature and animal life. All those trees on all that land on all those Metro properties at what cost? I'm sick of hearing that Metro has no money. How much does this tree cutting cost? There were at least 10 contractors for at least five days (including Sunday — overtime pay?) at this location alone to cut down all the trees along this Metro property. Is that what our tax dollars are going to — subsidizing the destruction of the environment?

MISCELLANEOUS

YAHOO NEWS

(Press Release) EPA and American Rivers Award \$1.37 Million in Grants to Restore Potomac Highlands Rivers, Clean Water The Environmental Protection Agency and American Rivers today announced the six recipients of \$1,373,119 in environmental grants to benefit communities, and protect rivers and clean water in the Potomac Highlands region of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia. The announcement was made at Frostburg University in Frostburg, Md. by EPA Regional Administrator Shawn M. Garvin, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, and American Rivers Senior Vice President for Conservation Chris Williams. The university will be involved in the Frostburg Grows, Grow It Local Greenhouse Project, submitted by Western Maryland Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc, one of the six projects selected to receive a grant. This project will convert unused mine land into a five-acre greenhouse complex designed to train community members for high quality jobs while producing local food and tree seedlings. Under a cooperative agreement with EPA, American Rivers is implementing the environmental grant program which supports local economies and quality of life improvements in the Potomac Highlands, as well as protecting the Highlands' valuable ecosystems, some of which host the most diverse and globally important resources on Earth.

BNA DAILY ENVIRONMENT REPORT

Proposed Air Standards for Fracking Not Cost-Effective, API Says The American Petroleum Institute says proposed air pollution standards for hydraulic fracturing operations are not cost-effective and urges EPA to make significant changes to the standards before a deadline to finalize the rule next Tuesday. The trade association says in a letter to Administrator Jackson that EPA made incorrect assumptions about the content of volatile organic compounds in natural gas, which led to flawed assumptions about the rule's cost-effectiveness.

EPA Opens Comment Period on Greenhouse Gas Rules for Power Plants EPA opens the public comment period on its proposed greenhouse gas limits for new fossil-fuel fired power plants with its publication today of the proposed new source performance standards. The agency will accept comments until June 12 and will announce separately a schedule for public meetings. The proposed standards would limit new power plants with a generating capacity greater than 25 megawatts to 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per megawatt-hour. Most new natural gas-fired combined cycle power plants should be able to meet that standard with no additional controls, EPA says.

Report Recommends Use of Farm Bill to Address Polluted Runoff A report from the Environmental Working Group recommends that Congress act to ensure that the farm bill serves as the primary tool for addressing threats to drinking water caused by polluted runoff from agricultural operations. Continuing to clean up contaminated runoff, if current trends continue, ultimately will be unsustainable, according to the report, Troubled Waters: Farm Pollution Threatens Drinking Water. The only way to tackle the problem is at the source—on the farms—where pollution occurs by preventing nutrient overload, the report says.

Interior Notes Earthquakes Linked to Wastewater Wells, Not Oil, Gas Wells A new study on possible connections between wastewater disposal wells and earthquakes prompts an Interior Department official to offer a clarification, especially on possible linkages to oil and gas production. Interior Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes posts a blog entry noting that publication of an abstract of the U.S. Geological Survey study was followed by a flurry of reports that apparently focused on the oil and gas connection. “USGS's studies do not suggest that hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as ‘fracking,’ causes the increased rate of earthquakes,” Hayes says. “USGS's scientists have found, however, that at some locations the increase in seismicity coincides with the injection of wastewater in deep disposal wells.”

Energy Department Ahead of Schedule in Goal to Reduce Solar Energy Cost The Energy Department is “ahead of schedule” in meeting its goal to make electricity generated by solar power cost-competitive by 2020 with energy produced from traditional sources, a department official says. Excess supply and increased global competition have driven “dramatic reductions” in the price of utility-scale solar installations, says Minh Le, acting deputy manager and chief engineer of DOE's Solar Energy Technologies Program.

NEW YORK TIMES

EPA Weighs Texas Plan to Cut Haze in National Parks Last year, as wildfires raged in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, visitors to Guadalupe Mountains National Park had to settle for a more limited view when hiking up Guadalupe Peak, Texas' highest point. “All summer, there was a haze here,” said Jonena Hearst, the park's geologist. Even before the fires, she said, visibility had been decreasing slightly over time. The Environmental Protection Agency wants cleaner air at national parks across the country, including Guadalupe Mountains and Big Bend in Texas. By November, it is supposed to complete a plan that could regulate emissions from dozens of Texas' industrial plants, with the goal of reducing haze at parks. Texas officials who would execute the plan are not seeking any new controls, and the electric power industry, unusually, is taking the prospect of a new E.P.A. rule in stride. “Big Bend is our largest national park, but there is very little industry around that area, so these new rules don't really have much effect on generators,” said Walt Baum, executive vice president of the Association of Electric Companies of Texas. Stephanie Kodish, the clean air counsel for the National Parks Conservation Association, said the visibility protection for parks has been decades in the making. The haze controls will apply to a variety of air pollutants, including particulate matter, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide. By May 15, the E.P.A. will decide whether to accept a state haze plan approved in 2009 by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The T.C.E.Q. says no additional controls on Texas industrial plants are necessary, and that dust storms originating “with little or no human activity” from the nearby desert have a big impact on some days.

LEGAL NEWS LINE

Fracking not polluting Pa. town, EPA says PHILADELPHIA (Legal Newslne) - A report issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency states that fracking has not polluted the water of homes in the town of Dimock, Pa. Fracking is the process of high-pressure pumping water, chemicals and sand into a deep well to create cracks in methane-bearing shale, allowing the gas to be collected. The EPA said Friday, "EPA has completed and shared with residents and Pennsylvania state officials the second set of sampling at 20 private drinking water wells in Dimock, Pa. This set of sampling did not show levels of contaminants that would give EPA reason to take immediate action. "EPA remains committed to providing Dimock residents with the best available data and information on the quality of drinking water as expeditiously as possible." This confirms an earlier report by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection - and the company drilling for gas in the area. Dimock is part of the Marcellus shale field, which is potentially a major producer of natural gas. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the rock formation contains 84 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered natural gas. Residents are convinced their drinking water is polluted by the drilling of Cabot Oil and Gas Corp. Environmental groups, which vehemently oppose fracking everywhere it is used, promote the idea that fracking pollutes drinking water. They are voicing their displeasure with the EPA findings. The town is a focal point of the anti-fracking movement. Even after the latest reports they still claim there is pollution. Claire Sand-berg, of Water Defense, dis-agrees with the EPA's con-clu-sion. She says those very same tests show contamination. "The pre-lim-i-nary results EPA Region 3 has released so far show that 20 per-cent of wells tested con-tain dan-ger-ous con-cen-tra-tions of methane. When the water that flows into your pipes has lev-els of methane that high, you are essen-tially liv-ing inside a bomb that could explode at any moment. And that is not safe," she said. But not all residents feel their water is polluted. The Fox 40 television station in nearby Binghamton N.Y. quoted one resident, Loren Salsman, as saying, "I've been reviewing the data for about a year and a half now and I didn't see anything significant in any of the data and it's not surprising that the EPA hasn't found anything as well."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shell: Gulf oil sheen dissipating; source unknown as undersea robots check for leaks, seeps NEW ORLEANS — A 10-mile sheen of oil off Louisiana's coast appeared to be dissipating as unmanned underwater vessels continued to search for its source, a federal agency and Royal Dutch Shell PLC said Thursday. The sheen, described by the Coast Guard earlier Thursday as about a mile wide and 10 miles long, was spotted Wednesday afternoon in the area of two Shell production platforms. But the oil giant said it's confident the oil didn't come from its operations.